



Letters on Leadership #28 – Monkey Bars

“Don’t ever ask your Marines to do something that you are not willing to do yourself.”

Three months ago, my son, Axel joined a “Youth Ninja Team,” at a facility called Ultimate Obstacles in West Boylston, MA. His coach is excellent and he (and I) are continuously challenging Axel to push himself to get outside his comfort zone on all of the obstacles (imagine American Ninja Warrior obstacles for kids). As an example, when Axel first started, he was incapable of completing the monkey bars. After three months of hard work, as well as physical and mental toughness, Axel now does them with ease.

Yesterday, my day started at 3:30am. We conducted an event with a company in Magnolia, Arkansas (if you try to find it on a map, you will be looking for a long time). Upon completion of a speech, our Wilderness Leadership Challenge and a full debrief, I drove four hours back to Dallas, Texas and worked out at a gym near my hotel, at nine o’clock at night. The gym had a set of monkey bars. I was leaving the gym exhausted from two days of travel and instructing an event. I glanced at the monkey bars and continued to the locker room. While showering though, I couldn’t stop thinking about those darn monkey bars. I didn’t want to do them – I was tired – I had already worked out – I didn’t feel good... all of the same excuses my son gives me prior to trying new things, that I am asking (read “forcing”) him to do.

I got out of the shower, put my sweaty workout clothes back on, went upstairs and did the monkey bars. Why? Because we can’t ask our Marines (or sons, daughters, husbands, wives, student-athletes or corporate teammates) to do something that we aren’t willing to do ourselves.

Yet...we do. We make our children get outside their comfort zone daily (eat their vegetables, try new sports, take a tougher class, look adults in the eye when they are speaking, learn how to ride a bike, swim, ice skate etc etc etc). And then, we as the parents walk by those monkey bars...

Don’t.

If we expect our athletes or co-workers to show up five minutes early for a meeting with a pen and paper, we must do the same for all of our meetings, as well. If we are going to tell our sons and daughters to eat their vegetables, we must eat them, as well. If we are going to challenge our



sons and daughters, athletes and corporate teammates to do the monkey bars, then we have to do them too!

Don't ever ask your Marines to do something that you aren't willing to do yourself.

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